

### Paul's Defense Before a Roman Governor

#### Acts 24

Acts 24:1-9: *"Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul. <sup>2</sup> And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: "Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, <sup>3</sup> we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. <sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. <sup>5</sup> For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. <sup>6</sup> He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. <sup>7</sup> But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands, <sup>8</sup> commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him." <sup>9</sup> And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so."*

#### Background Notes

In Acts 23, a Roman military commander rescued Paul from an angry Jewish mob in the Temple courts. The next day he brought Paul before the Jewish Sanhedrin, the governing body of the Jews that was allowed to decide in legal cases - except for cases that required capital punishment. The death penalty could only be carried out by Rome. That's why the Jewish rulers brought the Lord Jesus before the Roman governor, Pilate.

In Paul's self-defense before the Sanhedrin, he was able to split their ranks by causing dissension between the religious parties of the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Acts 23:6-10: *"But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" <sup>7</sup> And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup> For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. <sup>9</sup> Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." <sup>10</sup> Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks."*

When Paul said that he was a Pharisee, he meant that he believed in angels, and the supernatural, and the resurrection of the body - as the Pharisees did. Since the Sadducees didn't hold these beliefs, Paul's statement caused a division between the Pharisees and the Sadducees in the council. Thus there was a renewed uproar, and the Roman commander once again had to rescue Paul from imminent death, and took him into the barracks of the Antonia Fortress, which adjoined the Temple courts.

After a plot was uncovered to ambush and kill Paul on the way to his next appearance before the Sanhedrin, the Roman commander decided to send Paul and his contentious case to Felix, the Roman governor or procurator of the Roman province of Judea and Samaria. So Paul was taken, under heavy guard, to Caesarea, which was the headquarters of the Roman Empire in that area. Paul's defense before Felix is recorded in Acts 24.

Before we move to our doctrinal points, notice that in some translations, there is no verse 7. This is not a printer's error. The reason is that many manuscripts of Acts do not have the end of verse 6, verse 7, and the beginning of verse 8. Therefore some translations have left out this part of the text. We believe that the content of this portion of the text is true and accurate, but whether it is part of the inspired text of Scripture is difficult to say. Don't let this upset you! The Bible is **not** filled with these textual questions. There are relatively few of this kind of question concerning the well-preserved text of the Bible.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Believers should *expect* the opposition to manipulate the truth.

Ananias, the high priest, left his duties in Jerusalem and led the group that traveled 60 miles down to Caesarea to accuse the apostle Paul. This was very unusual, and it shows how much the Jews wanted to get rid of Paul. The high priest's group brought along a sharp lawyer named Tertullus.

Tertullus began his case against Paul by flattering Felix (who was certainly not the nice guy Tertullus made him out to be!) Then Tertullus proceeded to manipulate the truth, bringing three false accusations against the apostle Paul.

- a. *Paul was a troublemaker and insurrectionist.*
- b. *Paul was the ringleader of a new and unrecognized (and therefore illegal) religious sect, known as the "Nazarenes."*
- c. *Paul had tried to desecrate the Temple.*

Paul defended himself against all three of these false charges – charges that were actually a skillful manipulation of the truth. Manipulation of the truth is characteristic of many unbelievers today when it comes to describing Christians, the Christian faith, and the teachings of the Bible. *Scientific facts are manipulated* to make it appear that mankind has evolved. *Medical facts are manipulated* to make it appear that the unborn fetus is not fully human. *Historical facts are manipulated* to make it appear that we don't have the true record of Jesus in the Gospels, but rather that "true" historical Jesus was preserved in the "Gnostic gospels," that were banned by the early Church.

Those are a few examples of how the truth is manipulated today. Christians who hold to the biblical facts are accused of brainwashing – not only ourselves, our children, our churches, but trying to brainwash the whole society as well. Believers should expect the opposition to manipulate the truth.

## 2. Believers should defend themselves, but not manipulate the truth.

Acts 24:10-23: *“Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: “Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, <sup>11</sup> because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. <sup>12</sup> And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. <sup>13</sup> Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. <sup>14</sup> But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. <sup>15</sup> I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. <sup>16</sup> This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.*

<sup>17</sup> *“Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, <sup>18</sup> in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. <sup>19</sup> They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. <sup>20</sup> Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, <sup>21</sup> unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, ‘Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.’”*

<sup>22</sup> *But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case.” <sup>23</sup> So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.”*

Paul defended himself against all the false charges by simply stating the facts. He didn't resort to manipulating the truth. He had only been in Jerusalem for a few days - too short a time to organize an insurrection against Rome. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, not to cause riots. Yes, he was involved in a religious Jewish group known as “The Way,” but it was not an illegal sect. This group taught the Jewish Law and prophets, including a resurrection of the righteous and the wicked - teachings that Orthodox Judaism had always taught. He had not desecrated the Temple. In fact, he was in the Temple complex to bring alms to the poor people of Jerusalem. (Remember, Paul had been collecting these alms from the churches during his third missionary journey.)

So Paul defended himself by simply stating the facts without manipulating or bending the truth, and we should do the same. Unfortunately, well-meaning Christians sometimes resort to “bending the truth” when trying to defend themselves, or the Christian faith, or the Bible. We should not do this – because there is no need to bend the truth!

Here's an example. A few years ago a Christian pamphlet claimed that there was astronomical data from NASA to prove that there was a missing day in the universe, thus explaining the long day in Joshua 10. This story was propagated to defend the historical record of the book of Joshua. However, when this claim was checked out, it was found that no such data exists.

As Christians, we need to be careful. We are called to defend the truth of the Bible and contend for the Christian faith, and we have the right to defend ourselves from slander and false accusation - but we should do so by stating the facts, and leaving the results in the hands of God. Believers should defend themselves, but not manipulate the truth.

## Practical Application

### Make your witness personal!

*Acts 24:24-27: "And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. <sup>25</sup> Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." <sup>26</sup> Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. <sup>27</sup> But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound."*

Felix and his wife Drusilla called for an interview with Paul. According to verse 22, Felix knew some things about the Christian group that was called "The Way" - probably because Drusilla, who was Jewish, shared with him what she knew about this "new religious sect."

When Paul began talking about righteousness, and self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened (v25). Why? Because Paul's witness was getting too personal! Felix had stolen Drusilla from her first husband, and his life and lifestyle were far from being characterized by righteousness and self-control.

The apostle Paul, like John the Baptist with Herod, zeroed in on Felix in a personal way, and thus Felix was no longer able to discuss the Christian faith on an intellectual level. Many people today are willing to discuss Christianity or the Bible on an intellectual level, but when the discussion becomes personal they immediately back off, and even become upset or angry.

Paul made his witness personal. The gospel can change lives - but before lives can be changed, acknowledgement and repentance of sin is required. Felix did not like this personal approach of Paul's witness. And neither will sinners today, but this is the way people are saved. Make your witness personal!